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'What Arkansas Needs Is a University Press'

By DOUG SMITH
Of the Gazette Staff

Most Arkansans don't know — yet — that they need a university press, having gotten by without one for so long. William E. Henderson knows, and is willing to inform others, as he did in a paper presented April 25 at a meeting of the Arkansas Historical Association.

"Here in Arkansas there is a shortage of quality books about our state and its people," Henderson said. "We need a mechanism to publish titles which will help Arkansans and others to understand our heritage, natural resources, economic opportunities, social problems and what is required of us in order to have a good life in a good environment — books which are not being published because they are lacking in commercial feasibility.

"We need a university press to extend the educational thrust of the state's universities by publishing books on academic research in various fields," Henderson said. "We need a university press to help preserve and interpret Arkansas's heritage in books of history, art, archaeology and folklore. We need a university press to help stimulate the state's economic and cultural growth by publishing informational and reference books on these subjects. We need a university press to stimulate and to provide an effective outlet for scholarly productivity on our university campuses. In brief, we need a university press in Arkansas to provide for the recording, publication and preservation of knowledge that, otherwise, will not be recorded, published and preserved."

In other words, we need a university press bad, in Henderson's opinion. Whether we are likely to get it is another question altogether, but Henderson has done some thinking on that, too. First, though, a little discussion of what a university press is, and what it isn't, might be in order.

Henderson says that a university press is "an agency, department or association affiliated with one or more institutions of higher learning that searches out and publishes scholarly and educational books which serve a public purpose." The bylaws of the American Association of University Presses define a university press as "the scholarly publishing arm of a university or college or of a group of such institutions within a state or geographic region." J. G. Goellner, director of the Johns Hopkins University Press at Baltimore, has said that the primary purpose of a university press is the same as that of a university — to advance knowledge.

As Henderson noted, there are some common misconceptions about university presses, such as: (1) A university press has its own printing facilities (with very few exceptions, university presses employ commercial firms to print and bind their publications); (2) a university press publishes textbooks (commercial publishers jealously guard their right to textbooks, the most profitable field in publishing); (3) a university press exists

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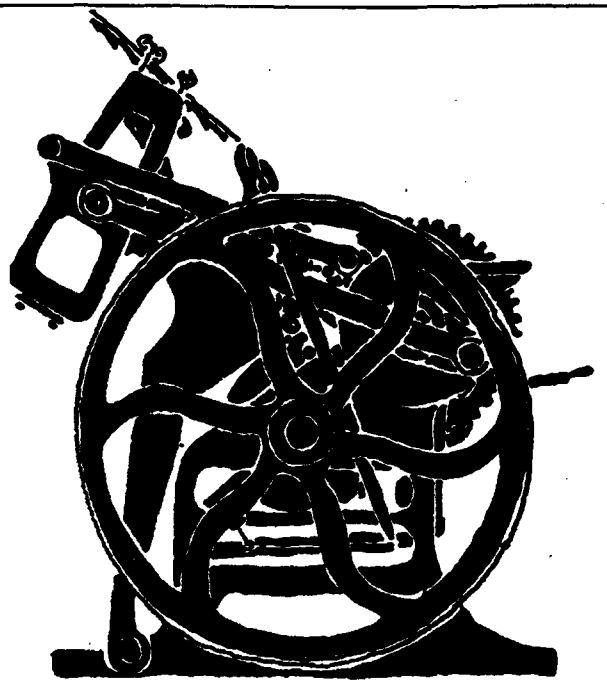

— Illustration by C. Spencer Morris

Neighbors Offering Relief in Publishing

The three publishers that have done the most to fill the vacuum created by Arkansas's lack of a university press are the University of Oklahoma Press at Norman, the Louisiana State University Press at Baton Rouge and the Memphis State University Press.

None has official status as a proxy "University of Arkansas Press," nor seeks it, according to their editors. But in pursuit of their own regional interests, all have published works of special Arkansas interest, and it can be assumed that some of these would have been published by a University of Arkansas Press, if there were such a thing.

There are about 75 university presses in the country. At least 32 states, including all of the states bordering on Arkansas, have one or more university presses in connection with their state-supported institutions of higher learning. Most of the best-known private universities have university presses. The giants of university publishing are the University of Chicago, the University of California and Harvard University, each of which publishes more than 150 volumes a year. At the other extreme, some university presses publish fewer than a dozen volumes annually.

Virtually all university presses are subsidized to one degree or another. Only a handful of the most successful are self-supporting through sales. Publishing costs — like everything else — have risen sharply in recent years. As Edward A. Shaw, director of the University of Oklahoma Press, said, "It would take a lot of money to start a university press now."

The University of Oklahoma Press, established in 1929, is a "medium-sized" university press, Shaw said, publishing 40 to 50 books a year. By regional standards, it is one of the most prestigious and successful of university presses and has achieved the enviable status of being nearly self-supporting. "We receive relatively little money from the University," Shaw said.

Profitability isn't the main goal of a university press. One of its missions is to publish works that would be deemed unprofitable by commercial publishers. Still, a university press can't ignore sales entirely, Shaw said.

"We have to publish a number of books that sell, because we publish a number that won't sell — books that commercial houses won't touch, but that are scholarly, important works," Shaw said. "We do have some that sell, and they subsidize the others." Sales amount to about $1.75 million annually, he said.

"We kind of regard ourselves as a regional publisher — Oklahoma, Arkansas, Texas, Kansas, New Mexico, Colorado," Shaw said. He said the University of Oklahoma Press hadn't published extensively on Arkansas *per se* — although it had done some of that — but had published extensively on Arkansas as part of the region. "We did a book on the Ozarks recently [*The Ozarks: Land and Life*, by Milton D. Rafferty], and we plan another one soon." Also, Shaw said, there is

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Arkansas Badly Needs a University Press for a Variety of Reasons, Consultant Says

primarily to publish the writings of the parent university's own faculty (generally, about half of a university press' publications originate within the parent university, sometimes less).

University presses are almost as old as printing itself — the first one was established at Oxford in 1478. Cambridge was next, naturally; its press was founded in 1521. The Johns Hopkins University Press, established in 1878, is the oldest university press in continuous operation in America.

Anyone considering establishment of a university press — and Henderson hopes we all will consider it — must recognize that a university press costs money. Which is probably why Arkansas doesn't have one. Goellner has said, "University press publishing is subsidized publishing, let there be no doubt about that." Even the university presses that receive no money from their parent institutions must rely on outside financial assistance, such as foundation grants.

Henderson, a community development consultant with the state Economic Development Department, is pretty much a one-man lobby for a university press at the moment. He'd welcome company. Henderson has a long-standing interest in Arkansiana, but his involvement with the university press issue really began during the period when he was director of the state Parks and Tourism Department. The History Commission was one of the agencies under his supervision then, and he became aware that Arkansas historians were hampered by the lack of a university press.

Henderson abetted the introduction of a bill to establish a university press at the 1979 legislative session. The bill, sponsored by Representative W. F. Foster of England, never came to a vote, but that wasn't unexpected. The real purpose of that bill was merely to broach the idea in the legislature. Henderson hopes that another bill, with broader support, will be introduced next year, although he has no assurance on that point. He said it was ironic that the one prominent figure in Arkansas higher education with whom he'd discussed a university press, and received encouragement from, was Carl Whillock, who was then the president of Arkansas State University at Jonesboro. Since that discussion, Whillock has left higher education.

"Probably the most significant change during the past 20 years in the university press movement has been the establishment of multi-university presses," Henderson said. "Under the multi-university or consortium approach, the press has several parent institutions within a state or a region. Insofar as the state or the region is concerned, there are two important advantages to the multi-university press: (1) Economies in operation, and (2) a broader base of support.

"In the event we in Arkansas should establish a university press during the 1980s, a good case can be made for a 'University Press of Arkansas' — a press affiliated with all of our state-supported, four-year universities," Henderson said. "In my opinion, chances for initial success and continuing support in the Arkansas General Assembly are better under the multi-university approach. In the matter of obtaining the support of the university presidents and chancellors, which is essential, it is important that a consortium press can be funded outside the budgets of the universities. This approach might avoid the possible concerns of some college administrators that funding a university press would take money away from other and more urgent needs in higher education — faculty salaries, for example.

"The question might be raised as to whether or not a consortium press would have the necessary insulation from political influences in order to retain its academic freedom," Henderson said. "While I can make no claim at all to expertise in this area, it would seem that 10 universities could provide as much insulation from state and federal politics as could one university. It is entirely possible that the multicampus control would offer the press even more insulation from that other breed of politics — campus politics."

Under Henderson's plan, a multi-university press in Arkansas would be governed by a commission consisting of the presidents and chancellors of the member universities or their designees. An editorial board consisting primarily of faculty members and administrators from the member institutions would develop editorial policy and have joint responsibility with the director of the press for accepting or rejecting manuscripts submitted for publication. The director, who would report to the commission, would be responsible for administration of the press.

"Whether a university press in Arkansas serves 10 universities or one university, it will be essential for the director of the press and the editorial board to assure that only quality manuscripts on useful topics are approved for publication," Henderson said. "It would be disastrous to select manuscripts on the basis of it being a certain university's turn to have a book published or because 'good old Joe' needs to publish a book to keep up his academic credentials. This should not happen with an editorial board of responsible persons. In event there should be a breakdown in the performance of the editorial board, then it would be time for the director of the press, whose professional reputation would be at stake, to veto the publication of an inferior manuscript."

On the crucial issue of funding, Henderson estimated that a state appropriation of $125,000 to $150,000 a year would support a university press with a staff of four or five persons. However, the state would have to provide some additional funding during the early years of the press's existence to pay for printing and binding. "Ideally, as the press develops a backlist of published books and attracts other funding sources to support its program, printing and binding should be funded from book sales, grants and gifts," Henderson said. "It might be desirable to establish a University Press Foundation to administer grants and gifts."

With austerity the watchword, this is not the best time to be talking about new state expenditures. But the amount isn't great, compared to other state-funded projects, especially if private philanthropic agencies would be generous with assistance.

The most important thing is that a fine Arkansas-flavored book like Glenn Shirley's *Law West of Fort Smith* is published by somebody, anybody. It would be icing on the cake if a book like that could have been published by a "University Press of Arkansas," rather than the University of Nebraska Press.

There is one more argument to be made. Even Mississippi has a university press.

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Neighbors Fill Publishing Void

a significant interlocking historical relationship between Arkansas and Oklahoma — the federal court at Fort Smith had jurisdiction over Oklahoma in the days when it was Indian Territory, for example — and this is reflected in the Oklahoma Press' publications.

The University of Oklahoma Press has four major series, although it publishes nonseries works as well. The "oldest and strongest" series, Shaw said, is "The Civilization of the American Indian." The latest book in that series has a strong Arkansas angle — *The Quapaw Indians: A History of the Downstream People*, by W. David Baird. The Quapaws were one of the early and most important tribes in Arkansas. The author, now chairman of the History Department at Oklahoma State University at Stillwater, formerly taught at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville.

"American Exploration and Travel" is another series. By coincidence, the latest publication in this series also deals with Arkansas — *A Journal of Travels into the Arkansas Territory During the Year 1819*, by Thomas Nuttall, edited by Savoie Lottinville, former director of the University of Oklahoma Press.

"The Western Frontier Library" is a popular series dealing with cowboys, badmen and peace officers of the Old West. It includes such titles as *The Life of John Wesley Hardin as Written by Himself* and *The Authentic Life of Billy the Kid* by Pat F. Garrett.

"Centers of Civilization" is the Oklahoma Press' only series that doesn't have a regional connection, Shaw said. It deals with the major cities of the world and their influence in the history of civilization. *London in the Age of Chaucer*, by A. R. Myers, is a representative title.

The Louisiana State University Press was established officially in 1935, but had published a few volumes before then, according to its director, Leslie Phillabaum. It publishes between 50 and 60 books a year and is "85 to 90 per cent self-supporting," Phillabaum said.

"The only state that we take a special interest in is Louisiana," Phillabaum said. "We do feel an obligation to provide useful information about the state, because we're partly financed by a state appropriation. So we do books on Louisiana history, birds, wildflowers, etc. But we have an interest in the South as a whole, and have published books about other states. Any book about Arkansas would be appropriate for us, because it's part of the South.

"Most people think of us in terms of Southern studies — history, literature, politics," Phillabaum said. "Last fall, we published an *Encyclopedia of Southern History*."

In 1978, the LSU Press published *The Arkansas Rockefeller*, a political biography of former Arkansas Governor Winthrop Rockefeller, by John Ward, a former Rockefeller aide who is now the managing editor of the Conway *Log Cabin Democrat*. Next fall, it will publish *Crisis at Central High*, an account of the 1957-58 integration crisis by Mrs. Elizabeth Huckaby of Little Rock, former dean of girls at Central. The LSU Press has published three volumes of poetry by Miller Williams, a professor of English at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville.

The Memphis State University Press is relatively young, established in 1968, and until recently was quite small. It has expanded greatly in the last 1½ years — from publishing six books a year to publishing between 24 and 30. Mrs. Joy Bailey Dunn, editor of the Memphis State Press, said, "We have always been subsidized. We hope to move on to become self-supporting, but it takes time. OU is just getting there, and they're an old established university press."

Within the last year, the Memphis State Press has published a couple of books intimately related to the University of Arkansas — *Hog Wild*, the autobiography of Frank Broyles, the U of A athletic director and former football coach, and *Medical Education in Arkansas*, a history of the institution now known as the University of Arkansas Medical Sciences Campus, which is another work by W. David Baird. However, there is no official arrangement between the U of A and Memphis State, Mrs. Dunn said. "We've been fortunate to get a lot of fine manuscripts from Arkansas, but it's been on an individual basis," she said. *Life in the Leatherwoods* by John Quincy Wolf, an account of the author's boyhood in the upper White River country of the 1870s and '80s, is another Arkansas book in the Memphis State catalogue.

Because of its youth, the Memphis State Press doesn't yet have an identifying specialty, in the way that the University of Oklahoma Press is known for its Indian Civilizations series, or the LSU press for Southern studies. Mrs. Dunn said that one of the Memphis State Press' more ambitious projects was the Tennessee County History Series. Over a period of 8½ to 9 years, the Press will publish a volume of history on each of Tennessee's 95 counties.

— DOUG SMITH